

IMAGES & REALITY IN THE SOVIET UNION

by Prof. V . L . ALLEN .

(University of Leeds)

A VITAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE MOST URGENT PROBLEM
OF OUR TIME .

A J.D. BERNAL PEACE LIBRARY BOOKLET.

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THE AUTHOR

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FOREWORD

This pamphlet is a slightly amended version of a lecture which I was invited to give to the J.D. Bernal Peace Library at Imperial College, London in May, 1983.

It was a privileged opportunity to give the lecture. I had never met J.D. Bernal except through his prolific writing. This acquaintance, however, was enough to reveal to me his exceptional qualities: his ability to combine science with humanity, to relate scientific achievement to social responsibility, to remember always that everything done in the name of science is eventually essentially about the subsistence of ordinary people, its improvement or deterioration.

At the forefront of Bernal's mind, and epitomized in his activities, was the responsibility on everyone, scientists in particular, to spread the benefits of material achievement by removing those structural factors in society and between societies which create privilege. A precondition, however, for Bernal's world without want, was a world without war. He showed the elementary connection between war and deprivation and poverty. It is a connection which is starkly present today. Wars destroy and retard progress. Wars and preparation for wars consume resources which are thereby denied for use in health and education. Every additional bomb necessarily means less hospitals, schools and universities.

From the Cold War period until his death in 1970, the prevention of war was Bernal's main preoccupation. "War", he wrote, "has always been the curse of civilization."

War changed its character during Bernal's lifetime but most of all through the invention of nuclear weapons. From the moment the first atomic bombs were dropped by the Americans on Hiroshima and

Nagasaki in 1945 his fear was of a war of complete universal annihilation. He aimed, he said to show "the real meaning in terms of certain human death and suffering of (the) catch phrase, 'the great deterrent', 'massive retaliation' and 'limited war with tactical atomic weapons'."*

The language is familiar. We still argue over the same issues: about the real meaning of nuclear war, about limited, tactical theatre wars, about the possibilities of survival.

A London Times headline on 21st June 1983 stated: "New nuclear survival strategy for Britain." The Government is now examining the feasibility of mass evacuation. When Bernal wrote in 1957 official advice was to stay indoors, whitewash the windows, fill the bath with water and wait for two days. Government advice is still criminally misleading. All that has altered is the scale of possible death and destruction. We have moved from a position where the universe could be destroyed to one where it could be destroyed many times over.

V.L.Allen. Oct 1983.

* World Without War by J.D. Bernal, 1958, p.3.

IDENTIFYING THE ENEMY

The Western powers still have the same enemy, portrayed as imperialistic, marauding, ruthless, brutal, tyrannical, oppressive and dictatorial. All of these epithets are subsumed in an implacable blanket hostility to Communism. Not a dot has altered in our indictment of the Soviet Union since the Cold War period of the 1950's. The issue is still presented as comprising the alternatives of risking nuclear war and genocide or facing a cruel sub-human domination by the Soviet Union. Our preference is epitomized in the slogan "better dead than red".

It is clear that the identity and nature of our enemy is central to the massive build-up of nuclear arms. What kind of society is it that has provoked an undiminished, implacable hostility from our Governments, Labour and Conservative alike? What does the Soviet Union represent to cause NATO to refuse to say it will not engage in a pre-emptive strike to destroy it? What is the nature of the evil characterized by the Soviet Union which is so abhorrent that we are prepared to risk our own destruction to avoid it?

One would think that the issue underlying these questions would be uppermost in our minds, would be at the centre of a debate. After all we need to be absolutely sure of our ground before embarking on the virtual destruction of human society. Successive governments, starting with the Labour Government led by Clement Attlee, which have committed us, ordinary people, to a nuclear war strategy, would, one would have thought, have paused at every decision-making stage, to say, "are we sure?" does the Soviet Union pose such a threat?" In addition, one would have thought, successive Government since 1945 would have wanted to provide information about the Soviet Union, provoke discussion among the general public; in other words to consult the electorate and obtain a mandate before embarking on a build-up of nuclear arms, let alone using them.

Those governments did the very opposite. They made their decisions in secret to such an extent that only cabals of favoured Cabinet Ministers were involved. Parliament, Governments and Cabinets were kept in ignorance. They acted as if battles were fought only by professionals with hand weapons in field formations; as if the extension of democratic decision-making was irrelevant for contemporary warfare. But what is, perhaps, more important is that there has not at any time been a

Parliamentary debate about why Britain should contemplate war with the Soviet Union, why we should direct our nuclear missiles at a country which, until September, 1945, was our ally in war with Germany. In consequence, the British people have been informed only through clichés, slogans, smears and innuendos.

By and large the Soviet Union is our enemy by assumption. It is essential that this assumption should be explored in public. Decisions which affect the general well-being of people should never be taken from their purview. Secret diplomacy and privileged decision-making are not simply inappropriate in the age of nuclear technology but confer impossible responsibilities on individuals which create added grave dangers. It is not impossible to open up vital questions about war for debate. For the first time since 1945 we had the opportunity in June 1983 of debating nuclear missile strategy in a general election due to the Labour Party's policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament. But this opportunity was evaded by the Labour Party, and electors were denied the chance to air their fears and apprehensions about sides in the nuclear arms race.

The choice of enemies in the past has usually been determined by geopolitical factors. For this reason there are traditional enemies, normally with common frontiers and common but competitive interests. Wars have moved frontiers, extended the hegemony of one country as against another, provided labour supplies, outlets for overcrowdedness and more recently under capitalism provided access to sources of raw materials and markets. There are many countries which are traditional enemies of each other such as China and Vietnam, France and Germany. Russia is not the traditional enemy of Britain. Russia has never invaded Britain though twice, during the Crimean War and the War of Intervention in 1918, we have attempted to invade Russia. Britain and Russia have been on the same side in conflict more often than they have opposed each other. In the great conflicts in the world, the Napoleonic Wars and the two World Wars our two countries have been allies. In the last of these wars the survival of Britain itself was ensured only through enormous Soviet sacrifices. We owe that country we now perceive as our enemy a special debt.

Nuclear technology has changed the character of war and with it the identification of the enemy. War with nuclear weapons cannot be a release valve for a country in crisis, a source of patriotism. A war which destroys people makes frontiers irrelevant and market gains unnecessary.

Even if the consequences could be discounted a war technology which is intensely capital intensive cannot be utilized as a means of breaking out of an economic depression. It is said that there are American capitalists who would be willing to accept 20 to 40 million American dead in order to extend their control over markets but I find this hard to believe.

What kind of enemy is it then with which a country will engage in mutual genocidal conflict? What hideous qualities does it display? Can it possibly be inhabited by humans?

STEREOTYPES

Our attitudes towards other societies, the myths we display about them are often embodied in the stereotypical terms we use to describe their inhabitants. The stereotype of the Soviet Union, however, does not include people. It is portrayed as a system run by a machine. It has no heart and, because it is godless, no soul either. It has no sensitivities and no matter how it may be savaged, it feels no pain and cannot weep. It is described by President Reagan as the "evil empire" and by Mrs. Thatcher as "brutal and tyrannical". There is no need even for the conscience to flicker at the thought of the obliteration of this uninhabited Socialist sixth of the world.

This stereotype does not arise from the perception of experience, no matter how jaundiced, as in the case of the Germans, French, Italians, and Japanese. It arises from a presumption that the Soviet Union was, is and always will be the enemy of Britain. It is a vehicle to confirm an intention.

The stereotype is constructed around two allegations, namely that the Soviet Union commits crimes against other nations and that it has no regard for the human rights of its own people. The change of belligerency lists violations against Hungarians, Czechs, Afghans and menaces against the Poles. The change can be questioned, but even if it is allowed to stand what credit is given for the enormous, incalculable Soviet sacrifices as our ally in the Second World War? Have the universal resistance of the Soviet people to the Nazi invaders, the 900-day siege of Leningrad and the catalytic Battle of Stalingrad disappeared from our memories?

And where in the League Table of belligerents do our NATO partners, Germany and the U.S.A., stand? Germany is debited with two world

wars and has nothing on the credit side. The U.S.A., allied with Britain in two world wars, has a record of belligerency against other nations including Vietnam with about four million American induced casualties, Chile where democracy was destroyed, El Salvador, where fascism is supported. Clearly, belligerency is a nonsense reason for defining the Soviet Union as our enemy.

The second change concerns infringements of human rights but how should they be defined? Are mass unemployment and poverty infringements? And how should one classify brutality against blacks in South Africa and discrimination against them in the U.S.A.; the imprisonment of trade unionists in Turkey; Berufsverbote in West Germany; What penance is required from Germany for the genocidal treatment of its own Jewish inhabitants? In this company the situation of the Soviet Union for special denunciation seems rather suspicious.

DIVERSITY

It is difficult to characterize the Soviet Union in simple terms. It is large and diverse. From West to East it stretches over 11 time zones with an area of 14 times the combined size of Italy, France, Spain and Great Britain. Novosibirsk, a town in Western Siberia with 1.3 million inhabitants is located in an administrative area almost five times the size of Belgium. Such proportions are almost as difficult to comprehend as the megadeath and overkill, the jargon of the nuclear age. Phenomena, however, which are too vast to visualize give rise to fantasies and fantasies can be turned into monsters. As Peter Ustinov remarked in his surprisingly courageous book *My Russia*, "Russia has always been considered a sleeping giant by those frightened by the spectre of an awakened giant." It is by all standards a giant but by no standard a monster.

The Soviet Union contains wide ranging climatic and ethnic diversity. It combines the Arctic with the sub-tropical; Europe with Asia. Its history is that of diverse civilisations. It encapsulates the Old World; its diversity, its struggles and its achievements. Within its 15 Republics there are 126 ethnic and national groups, speaking more than 100 different languages and practising their own cultures. The languages of the Soviet Union are more developed, more freely spoken now than at any time in their histories. When languages and cultures are separated

from economic exploitation they grow and flourish. It is difficult for one living in a society which practices cultural imperialism to appreciate the manner by which ethnicity can be encouraged without the negative features of political nationalism. The restless nationalism of the Ukrainians, the Lithuanians, the Latvians and Estonians as projected here is one of the myths generated by exile groups and is not a part of Soviet reality.

CONFORMITY

There are strong pressures for conformity. First there are no economic class divisions through which conflicting interests are mediated. Virtually everyone in the Soviet Union has the same relationship to the production process. There are occupational groups but they do not reflect serious conflicts of interests. Secondly, there are common economic and political organizations. There is one political party and one general trade union organization. A trade union in Uzbekistan is exactly the same in form as one in Taunus, Vladimir or Irkutsk. Both diversity and conformity are visible features of Soviet life.

Much play is made of Soviet conformity by the myth makers. At the least offensive but ideologically important level conformity is correlated with drabness and drabness with equality. Capitalist societies which are structurally unequal in terms of power, property, income, educational opportunities have to legitimize inequality. Inequality in the distribution of wealth, for example, is projected as necessary for investment; inequality in education is justified as a means of sorting out intellectual excellence. An important part of the case *for* inequality is the case *against* equality. On every possible occasion, therefore, equality is attributed with negative features.

A policy of what might be called relative equality is pursued in the Soviet Union with regard to income and occupational status. Wage differentials are used as a means of distributing labour and occupations are differentiated according to their significance for society. Education is highly valued. In a Collective Agreement I examined for an engineering factory in Tashkent occupations were graded for entitlement for extra holidays. At the top of the list, with an entitlement of 31 extra holidays a year, were kindergarten teachers.

We do not acknowledge the possibility of individual development through collectivism therefore we never show the diversity of opportunities open to young people in the Soviet Union; to be an engineer or a

poet; an opera singer or an interpreter; a ballet dancer or a doctor. Though occasionally through the medium of television we see contradictions in our own myths in the persons of Olga Korbet, the gymnast or Valentina Tereshkova, the astronaut.

POSITION OF WOMEN

Absolute equality is the Soviet aim where ethnicity and gender are concerned. For women this means a diversity of occupational choice which has no parallel in the West. Women are excluded from some industries such as underground coal mining but in most occupations their presence approximates to their presence in the working population. I am not suggesting that there is no sexism in Soviet life. Women frequently combine unpaid domestic labour with paid employment and this is inhibiting and a form of inequality; it is also still difficult for women to penetrate the upper levels of decision-making on the same scale as men. Nonetheless sex inequality is qualitatively different from that in Britain. I will give you examples from the trade union movement which, in Britain, has barely been influenced by feminism. Women comprise 51 per cent of the labour force, and virtually all women are members of trade unions. At the level of primary trade union organization in factories and workplaces in general, 54 per cent of the chairpersons of trade union committees are women. The proportion of members of territorial, Republican and Central Trade Union Committees who are women is just over thirty-three per cent. 20 per cent of the chairpersons and secretaries of central unions are women.

The situation in British trade unions is different. Women in Britain constitute 43 per cent of the total number in employment. Only about 12 per cent of managers, however, are women. 40 per cent of women workers, amounting to 3,776,000 were members of trade unions in 1981. Women workers, however, are highly concentrated in particular occupations. Sixty-six per cent of all employees in education, welfare, health and related professional services are women; the percentage of women in clerical work is 75, in selling 61.3; in catering, cleaning, hairdressing and other personal services, 76.3. Women are concentrated, therefore, in a relatively small number of unions. If we take the nine unions, concentrated in these occupations, with the largest female memberships we find that less than 13 per cent of central executive

members are women while less than six per cent are full-time officers.

I am particularly concerned about the position of women in the U.S.S.R. as I am here, because I believe that the manner in which a society treats women is one measure of its quality. One third of the members of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet are women whereas about half of the members of the local Soviets of People's Deputies are women.

More women than men, 59 per cent as against 41 per cent, have higher education qualifications. They are at the head of factories, mills and offices. I met many such women. Statistics of course, can prove anything but here I shall let them speak for themselves. The fact that women of all ages can walk any street in any town at any time of the day or night without even the thought of being molested must be regarded as another sign of equality.

INDIVIDUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The most offensive grotesque distortion of Soviet life arising from the Western perception of conformity is the insistence that it occurs and can only occur through the suppression of individuality, and that such suppression is achieved through physical force by the K.G.B., other agencies of the State and the Communist Party. We contrast our condition of institutionalized pluralism with a Soviet monolith which behaves like Procrustes, the robber of Attica who fitted his victims to the length of his bed by cutting off their legs, or heads.

The picture which is painted is one of unsmiling, frightened furtive people who are afraid to talk openly because their privacy is violated and arrests are arbitrary. Central to it is the Soviet treatment of dissidents for this is the only visible evidence the West can collect to support its other accusations. Every shred of evidence of the harassment of dissidents is highlighted in our media to portray widespread, deep-seated intolerance in Soviet society.

It does not matter that the dissidents are few, mainly comprising intellectuals in Moscow who envy the life-styles of their Western counterparts. They are widely publicized. We have all heard of Scharansky, Bukovsky, Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov. Indeed their names are better known than our own dissidents, except those like E.P. Thompson who combine dissidence with a constant criticism of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet authorities are acutely sensitive about political dissidence, particularly by academics and writers who form groups, independent

of the conventionally recognized means of communication, with links with the West which are used to criticize the Soviet Union. This sensitivity leads the authorities to take harassing, punitive, sometimes repressive action.

The Soviet attitude to dissidence is not the random use of crude authoritarianism but is derived from its conception of democracy. The question as to whether democracy should tolerate all dissentient opinions, even those intent on destroying it, or not is debateable and unresolved, even in Britain. Which course a society takes, however, is determined by its particular historical path and not by rational discussion. The Soviet path, through the 1917 Revolution led it to attribute absolute moral qualities to democracy which are superior to the forms or institutions for elections. In Britain democracy is an arena for contending opinions with no opinion about good or evil. The most votes takes the government stage, even though this may lead to the ascent of fascism and the destruction of democracy. British democracy has no morality except that underlying the doctrine of limited tolerance.* It is simply about the institutionalized enforcement of procedures for making choices.

The majority in Soviet democracy is not that which is derived from counting votes but the dominance of the largest class. This dominance has to be reflected in economic as well as political terms, that is in the ownership and control of the means of production, and practised through mass participation by the majority class. These qualities which relate to the substance of democracy are sacrosanct and are protected from subversion whatever its source and no matter how it is conveyed. Soviet democracy, therefore, has an intense belief in its own rightness. The suppression of opinions hostile to it is intended to maintain its integrity.

British and American democracy which is capable of producing fascist, anti-democratic governments has also on occasions shown a belief in its own rightness by proscribing views perceived as hostile to it. At various times punitive, repressive action has been taken against atheism, socialism, communism and fascism. Indeed British and American democracy is tolerant only of criticisms which do not seriously endanger it. So the issue is not between absolute tolerance and intole-

* See *The Soviet Impact on the Western World* by E.H. Carr, Chapter 1, 1949, for a brilliantly incisive analysis of this point.

rance. Our criticism of Soviet political practice contains more than an element of hypocrisy which is reflected also in the extension of tolerance to fascists and neo-fascists as a means of repressing communists. The American protection given to the war-time Nazi, Klans Barbe, is an illustration of this but there are many others.

The Soviet intolerance of dissidents has been influenced by the practical needs of the moments as well as by continuities in Russian history. The Soviet Union existed within an ideological cordon sanitaire until after the Second World War. It continually had to resist the encroachment of ideas from capitalist countries which were aimed at defeating the purpose of the Revolution. Once the Civil War was ended, armed intervention by the West was ruled out except for a brief period in the late 1930's though it has been raised recently by President Reagan's talk of a crusade against Communism. The only possibility of re-establishing capitalism in Russia lay through spreading the ideas of capitalism. The suspicions about these ideas generated during the inter-war years still exist though there can be no question now of re-establishing capitalism there. Except in the Baltic States, virtually no one has any memory of capitalism in the Soviet Union. 85 per cent of its inhabitants were born after 1917. Those who know about it do so mainly from Soviet interpretations of its defects. In any event the contradictions in Soviet Society are far removed from the structure of capitalism. They can only lead to a more emphatic Communist society.

Literature, both prose and poetry, was a major source of criticism in Czarist Russia throughout the Nineteenth Century. Under Czarism, state oppression prevented the development of critical philosophy and social science, leaving literature as the only effective means of communicating intellectual criticisms of the society. Novelists and poets thus assumed a political significance in the eyes of the State and the general population. From Pushkin to Tolstoy they were harassed by the police. They became national heroes. In this process, literature assumed a valued role in society as a whole. The written word was widely read and communicated and its meanings were distilled.

The value of literature continued after the Revolution. All of the main Revolutionary leaders were writers. Lenin used the written word almost to the limit of its capacity as a means of arguing and politicizing. Poets, such as Mayakovsky, expressed Revolutionary feelings in succinct poetic terms. As illiteracy was eliminated the Soviet people became

avid readers and enhanced the importance of literature. It continued to be a source of analysis, of praise and of criticism.

Those who are treated seriously by society, whose work is scrutinized for social and political meanings, trends and advice, must expect to carry responsibilities and obligations. As they reap rewards they must expect to bear costs. Only when intellectuals in general and writers in particular are either largely ignored by the system, as in Britain, or where their work is absorbed by the system, as in the U.S.A., is it likely that they will be permitted general freedom of expression. Even then there are limitations, as in the case of the U.S.A. after World War I when text books were purged for radical ideas and teachers had to take loyalty oaths; and after World War II when universities and the Hollywood film industry went through a political exorcism, to rid them of Communist influences.

The attitude of the Soviet Union to criticism is highly selective. It is not hostile to criticisms of the pace and methods of change, to ideas which would make the transformation quicker; it does not stifle the public analysis of issues such as nuclear arms. The Soviet Union is a collectivist society; it resolves its problems from the level of anti-social behaviour in a block of flats to major economic problems through discussion. Facilities for meetings are everywhere. Each factory has its "Red Corner" where workers can meet before or after a shift to discuss grievances. The Communist Party and trade unions operate through meetings of members. In most factories workers discuss issues not only through trade unions but also as members of a production process through Standing Production Conferences. Discussing is a way of life in the Soviet Union.

Public criticism is encouraged. The right to complain by letters, signed individually or collectively to Government departments is enshrined in law. Letter writing to newspapers is institutionalized. *Pravda*, *Izvestia* *Trud* and the *Journal Soviet Trade Unions* receive millions of letters between them each year concerning complaints about work, union activities and Communist Party officials as well as living conditions and social activities. Their complaints in many respects deal with the application or misapplication of Government policies. Complaints are followed up. Many managers have been reprimanded or dismissed in this way. The A.U.C.C.T.U. has a complaints system in addition to its policy-making organs. Each year in its Annual Report it lists the number of letters, categorizes the complaints and gives inform-

ation about action taken over them.

Then there are the formal policy-making organizations, the Communist Party with a membership representing about 15 per cent of the adult population, Komsomol, the Young Communist League and trade unions representing more than 98 per cent of the work force. The rate of participation in all of these organizations is high. Trade Unions at factory level have a quorum for meetings of two-thirds of the appropriate membership. Those which I visited had attendance rates of between 80 and 90 per cent. The local trade union committee operate through Commissions which deal with different aspects of working life such as disputes, social security, education, production, housing. In this way about one-third of all trade union members are drawn into union activity.

People are involved in the Communist Party and Public organizations in order to run them, improve their efficiency, and contribute to the well-being of society. It is expected that criticisms should be constructive. It is not possible, however, to organize society on the basis of collectives, to encourage people to be educated and to provide them with information about current affairs and ensure that they will behave in a particular pre-determined way. It is not possible to encourage debate on some issues without interest spilling over to other issues. Societies which aim to suppress protest start by making any gatherings illegal. In Nazi Germany, political parties were disbanded, trade unions destroyed and all gatherings in public forbidden. If people are allowed to meet who knows what they will talk about. If the Soviet Union aims then to deny its people the right of protest it seems to be going about it in a rather perverse way.

When I returned in January 1983 from a 3 month visit to the Soviet Union I read in the press more than once that the Soviet authorities allow no debate about nuclear weapons. My experience contradicted that belief. I travelled freely to a place of my own choosing throughout the main urban areas of the country talking to Communist Party members and trade unionists; officials and rank and file members; workers and managers; students and lecturers. Everywhere the nuclear arms race was raised and discussed. Everyone wanted to talk about it.

The Soviet people believe they have a right to talk about war and to express opinions about the means of preventing it. They are more knowledgeable about the consequences of wars waged on them than

any other people. They withdrew from the First World War but only after they had suffered 7 million deaths; they tried to avoid the War of Intervention but through it and the consequent famine lost another 20 million lives. They were invaded in 1941 and suffered 20 more million dead. Each of these wars resulted in foreign occupation and much material destruction. Between 1941 and 1945, 1,710 cities and over 70,000 villages were razed to the ground; Premier cities such as Lenin-grad, Kiev, Minsk and Stalingrad were almost totally destroyed. They lost 40,390 miles of railway track and 60 per cent of their steel and coal producing capacity.

The Soviet people have much reason, then, to fear war. They ensure that it is not forgotten and that successive generations of children are educated about its horrors. They are still building memorials, opening war museums and they still weep over their losses. In Donetsk people remember the devastation of war through the million roses which now grow within its precincts. When they open a war museum or plant another rose they are extending a debate which has qualities which neither the Americans nor British can match or appreciate. No one there, to my knowledge, talks of the possibility of surviving a nuclear war; no grotesque casualty counts are made; there is no discussion of limited, theatre nuclear war. The Soviet people are not being conditioned to accept nuclear war by calculating the chances of survival.

Soviet people then, are living their lives within the context of freedoms which are ranked as important within Western capitalist societies. The manner in which they are exercised, however, and the constraints imposed on them are conditioned by the nature of Soviet Society. There is remarkably little similarity between freedoms in Western societies so one should expect differences between societies with qualitatively different structures. The meaning of the terms freedom, liberty and democracy are different. In the Soviet Union they have an economic base. It is a part of the freedom of ordinary people to be guaranteed work. There is not simply full employment there but guaranteed employment. The State is obliged to provide work. There are safeguards against dismissal. No worker can be dismissed without the agreement of the local trade union committee. Labour-saving machinery cannot be installed until the workers to be displaced are provided with alternative employment. People are now guaranteed accommodation. The basic necessities of life are cheap. Accom-

modation, lighting, heating and cooking cost no one more than six per cent of the annual salary; transport within urban areas is almost free for the prices for underground, tram and bus travel were fixed in the 1950s, and have remained unchanged; holidays are heavily subsidized by trade unions; the prices of basic foods such as bread, meat and potatoes are low. All these factors need to be considered when assessing relative freedom.

Workers' rights and conditions of work are protected by a highly detailed set of Labour Laws which was assessed and reformulated by trade unions in 1971. This covers general rights, the provision of collective agreements and labour agreement, working hours, free time, earnings, labour discipline, labour protection, female labour, teenage labour, provisions for study, labour disputes, participation in management and social insurance. A major function of trade unions is to ensure that the details of the legislation are enforced. There is no prohibition in this legislation or in any other of the right to strike. Strikes are so endemic in the West that it is presumed that if they do not exist it must be because they are not allowed to exist. I spent much time in Soviet factories and mines talking about the cause of labour disputes and their settlement. I found no evidence of strike action.

Within the totality of Soviet Society there are forces and mechanisms to perpetuate it, to preserve its form. Amongst these are the police and the K.G.B. A part of Western mythology is to exaggerate these forces in order to show Soviet people as repressed, cowed and humiliated. It might be that at one time in its history the K.G.B. exercised a disproportionate influence on the lives of some people. But institutions change as societies do and the K.G.B. is not an exception. A friend of mine in Moscow had several friends who worked for the K.G.B. I only wish I knew which of my friends worked for M15.

THE REASONS FOR THE MYTHOLOGY

My interpretation of the reality of Soviet life bears no relation to the stereotype. How then do I account for the difference? Firstly, one needs to recognize that the dominant ideology on *our* Society legitimizes private property and private accumulation and protects, therefore, a set of power relations in which power is unequally distributed. The main idea is individualism and this makes its impact through fragmenting

opposition. Individuals as such are powerless. It stands in contrast to collectivism. The ethic of individualism possesses its own mythology which glorifies its character by denying its defects and recognizing no alternative way of ordering individual relationships. To recognise good in an alternative power structure would hasten the demise of the existing one. All forms of social activity which contradict individualism are denigrated, distorted, perverted to show that they are the antithesis of freedom, liberalism and democracy. We can see this in our own lives through the ways in which trade unionism, socialism and communism are perpetually attacked by the mass media. But its most extreme form is the reporting of Soviet life.

No matter how the Soviet society is defined from the point of view of Western Capitalists it stands as the antithesis of Capitalism. For virtually the whole of its existence it has been regarded with anathema. There was some rejoicing in the West, especially in the U.S.A. when the Russian Czar was deposed in February, 1917. This was displaced by apprehension when the Bolsheviks assumed power in October, 1917. The apprehension turned to fear once it appeared that Bolshevism would survive. From early 1918 fear generated hostility and hostility legitimized the perversion of truth. From that time there has never been an objective assessment of Soviet activities except briefly and two handedly in the Second World War. Until the First World War ended, the Bolsheviks were branded as German agents in the control of the Kaiser. After the end of that War the governmental, public and media agencies which had fermented anti-Germanism turned almost naturally to anti-Bolshevism. In the U.S.A., the National Security League, the American Defence Society and the American Protection League which had converted ordinary Americans into super-patriots and spy-chasers set about transforming them into Bolshevik-haters. Horror stories appeared in the press claiming, for instance, that the Bolsheviks in Petrograd had an electrically operated guillotine which lopped of 500 heads an hour. Bolshevik rule was described as a compound of slaughter, confiscation, anarchy and universal disorder. The Bolshevik leaders were described as "assassins and madmen," "human scum," "crime mad", and "beasts". The official trade union movement joined in this campaign of distortion in an attempt to purge itself of radical associations. The U.S.A. only recognized the Soviet Union in 1933 and was the last major power to do so.

Establishment opinion in Britain and France was equally hostile.

The real feeling in the West, however, was not just expressed through newspaper headlines such as the declaration in the Daily Telegraph in 1920 that women had indeed been nationalized in Soviet Russia but through the war of intervention which began in February 1918 and continued for three years. The intervention of British, French and American troops generated the Civil War which caused so much dislocation of food production that there was a Great Famine in 1921-22 during which about 20 million Russians died. The cost to Soviet Russia of Western hostility was phenomenal in terms of destruction, chaos and the organisation of Soviet society. The formation of the Cheka, the penetration of the secret police into Soviet life, the imposition of the Terror during which the opponents of the Bolshevik regime were liquidated had their origins in the conditions caused by the intervention. The October Revolution was relatively bloodless and if the Allies had not intervened it might have remained that way.

Britain recognized the Soviet government in 1924. This did not signify British recognition of Bolshevism but merely the nature of diplomatic and trading relationships. The basic hostility of Britain to the Soviet Union continued from the Revolution without modification until the present day. The only change was in methods. On the one hand anti-Sovietism was spread through the use of the media; films, radio and later television, to create images in the minds of people about the evils of Soviet Communism. Soviet representatives were portrayed as spies and their friends as traitors. The myths have become a part of our thought processes; they influence the questions we ask of Communism in general and the Soviet Union in particular and they set out the answers. Without thinking, without drawing on any facts, without even any knowledge of the country we repeat instant explanations about Soviet people, their mannerisms, their method of government, their intentions which are always derogatory.

On the other hand, anti-Sovietism has been used to legitimate internal repression against radicals, Communists and trade unionists. In the U.S.A. the fear of Bolshevism sanctioned the police raids, arbitrary arrests, excessive prison sentences and physical violence which characterized the Red Czars after 1918. Under the mantle of a crusade against Bolshevism the American Socialist and Communist parties were destroyed and membership of the Trade Union movement decimated. In Britain communists were the focus of internal repression during the General Strike; the forged "Zinoviev Letter" in 1924 which purported to show the intervention of the Soviet government in British affairs caused the electoral defeat of the first Labour Government.

The Cold War period brought with it McCarthyism in the U.S.A. and intensified anti-Communism in Britain. The difference was one of degree and tactics. Progressive politics in the U.S.A. which was crushed by the "Red Scare" was dealt an almost lethal blow by McCarthyism as almost all types of political non-conformists were hounded out of their jobs and harassed in their social lives.

Now we see anti-Sovietism being used for even more macabre purposes. New myths about Soviet imperialism, its obsession with nuclear missiles and its eagerness to engage in a nuclear conflict are added to the old ones. The issues which anti-Sovietism raises are profound. In the first place, it enables the Western capitalist countries to masquerade the Soviet Union as an enemy without explaining that the real reason for their hostility is their intention to preserve the hegemony of capitalism and the concentration of power which this confers. The perpetuation of the myths, dangerous in any circumstances can be calamitous in this age of nuclear weapons. The most urgent task of the Peace Movement should be to demystify the Soviet image and to expose the reality of a country which wants to live at peace in the world. With no enemy in sight, ordinary people will realize the horrific risks involved in stockpiling nuclear weapons.

Secondly, anti-Sovietism is a brake on our own liberation and on the exercise of our own civil liberties. So long as it persists, progressive movements will be handicapped not only because it is used to justify repressive policies but also because in so far as it permeates our movements, it closes political options. Without the stigma attached to Soviet Communism British Socialism would be perceived in a more positive light. The solution to this problem is not to try to escape from the stigma by dissociating from it for this can never be successful. The solution is the very opposite. The stereotype has to be dismantled.

The J.D. Bernal Peace Library was founded during the Professor's lifetime in order to share in his work for the utilisation of scientific progress in the interests of all humankind, and above all in the achievement of peace: the ideal set out in his well-known work, *"World Without War"*.

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